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Educational Writings

I. REVIEWS AND BOOK NOTES

Some recent French readers and texts.—The short story is one of the literary types most used as reading material for the first two years of French; consequently teachers of French will welcome a new collection of Daudet's *Contes*.¹ These old favorites, "*Le Siège de Berlin*," "*La Dernière Classe*," "*La Mule du Pape*," "*Les Petits Pâtés*," are included, together with ten others probably less well known but equally interesting. There is a "chronological outline of the life and important works of Daudet," also a "chronological outline of some of the important facts of French history between 1850 and 1872." The notes are intended primarily to explain the historical and literary allusions of the text, idioms being relegated as a rule to the vocabulary. Both notes and vocabulary are well done although it is rather disconcerting to find no mention in either of so common an idiom as *tout à l'heure* ("*La Dernière Classe*"), and no explanation of the force of *bien* in *Veux-tu bien descendre* ("*La Mule du Pape*"). Each story has a questionnaire and composition exercise.

This collection well merits a prominent place in the teacher's list of intermediate reading texts for French.

Instructors who object to using as reading material anything but complete stories, comedies, novels, etc., will not be interested in the *French Dramatic Reader*² of Messrs. Maloubier and Moore; but the reader should interest any teacher of French who does not object to anthologies. It is a collection of scenes, one from each play, from seventeen comedies by thirteen different authors, beginning with Molière down through Marivaux and Beaumarchais to Labiche and Pailleron. The general arrangement is a very short sketch of the author, the setting and previous action of the play, the text of the scene chosen, the dénouement, then an anecdote about the author, finally an *exercice de conversation*. Sketch, setting, etc., are all given in French. About nine pages of English sentences based on the French text are given translation into French. Notes and vocabulary complete the book.

One might ask whether it would not have been better to make the selections somewhat longer even though this might limit the number of comedies and authors. In spite of the assertion in the preface, "especial care was taken to

¹ ALPHONSE DAUDET, *Contes Choisis*. Edited with notes, questionnaire, exercises, and vocabulary by Walter D. Head. New York: Macmillan Co., 1919. Pp. xvi+201. \$0.60.

² E. F. MALOUBIER and J. H. MOORE. *A French Dramatic Reader*. New York: Macmillan Co., 1920. Pp. vii+170. \$1.00.

arrange each selection as a complete entity," it is doubtful whether the student will feel this entity in the majority of cases. But waiving this objection, which after all is not particularly vital, the book offers very valuable material. Its use will probably be of a supplementary nature, a dessert to the main repast of French reading. For practice in reading, as a basis for conversation or free composition, for idioms, for an appreciation of French *esprit*, finally as material for memory work, this text is excellent. Let us hope that the reader may be as widely used as its good qualities merit.

In the preface to his *Nouveau Cours Français*¹ M. Fontaine says: "This book . . . aims merely to be a live, practical book for practical purpose, and its purpose is to give a working knowledge of the French language." No attempt is made "to present all the fine grammatical intricacies of the French language nor to be a guide to intensive study."

There is no striking departure from the usual run of grammars in the general arrangement of the forty-nine different lessons. The exercises are copious and, on the whole, well thought out. It is gratifying to note that the translation from English to French is not the only exercise thought worth while, but that a prominent place is given to questionnaires and to French sentences with missing French words to be supplied. Exception might well be taken, however, to the exercises in which the sentences to be corrected are of the general type: *Les beau manteau des fille etranger sont bleu*. Since there is no indication of the incorrect form by means of italics or bold-faced type, this form is the one which may be impressed on the student's mind. The vocabularies are well chosen, but in some cases are too long. Lesson 14 has about 45 words and expressions.

The French selections in the lessons are bright, interesting, altogether excellent. A very fine feature of the grammar is the review given after each ten lessons; this contains an index of grammatical points discussed, a list of the verbs used, review questions, and review exercises. In giving grammatical rules, M. Fontaine seems rightly inconsistent; those rules more easily understood he gives in French; those not so obvious in English. There is a valuable list of idioms after the last lesson. A novel and quite pleasing feature of the later lessons is the quotation and explanation of some of the most famous literary allusions, such as "*Qu'allait il faire dans cette galère*," "*Tout finit per des chansons*," etc.

The important question of pronunciation is taken up in a preliminary lesson. In such a small compass only the most obvious points can be noted, but it is all-important that these be given very clearly in order not to increase the already difficult task of the student. Exception, therefore, must be taken to the statement under the general heading "Sounds": "There are in French six open or simple sounds." No explanation is given of the words "open" or "simple." With this information, what will the student do when he meets the word *appeller* if he knows only the vowel *e*? Misleading also for most American students is the sentence: "*o* is short, as the *u* in 'mud,' bordering on the *o* in 'not' in the great majority of cases." To those teachers who have struggled against the lack of tensivity of the student's vocal organs when he tries to pronounce French sounds,

¹ A. C. FONTAINE. *Nouveau Cours Français*. Boston: Ginn & Co., 1919 (revised edition). Pp. xii+349. \$1.24.

the following statement is particularly exasperating: "All these open vowel sounds are produced with the vocal organs relaxed and the throat wide open; the smaller the effort, the better the pronunciation." Compare P. Passy: "*En considérant dans son ensemble le système des voyelles françaises, on remarque: . . . Qu' à l'exception des voyelles inaccentuées, toutes nos voyelles sont formées avec les muscles très tendus, non relâchés comme dans les voyelles brèves anglaises ou allemandes.*"¹ The remark "eu, when it is the final sound of a syllable, is pronounced a little fuller than the French *e* in monosyllables" is not at all clear. The word *médecin* is given as an example where the *e* is "feebly articulated"; but the *d* is voiceless due to assimilation with the following *c*; consequently the *e* must be silent.

Experienced teachers who want a grammar containing excellent French, interesting exercises, extensive treatment of the verb, can make good use of the *Nouveau Cours*; it would be a very satisfactory text to be used with students who have already done some French but who need a more thorough grounding in the general grammar of the French language.

JAMES KESSLER

UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

A survey of the social and business usage of arithmetic.—The movement to determine the school curriculum by scientific means is one of the most significant tendencies in present-day education. In this movement, Dr. Wilson's study² takes high rank. The specific purpose of his investigation is the determination of the "arithmetic actually used by adults in their social and business relations." His fundamental assumption is that one must consult adult activities to find out what arithmetical abilities the school should seek to develop in boys and girls. In accord with this assumption Mr. Wilson proceeds in thorough scientific fashion to investigate the arithmetic processes actually used by adults in their occupational and extra-occupational activities. To this end he has collected problems from the parents of sixth, seventh, and eighth-grade children in twenty-four middle western communities. The pupils in these grades were asked to collect every evening, over a period of two weeks, all the problems involving arithmetical solution which their parents had met during the day; 14,583 problems were thus secured from 4,068 persons, representing 155 different occupations.

The study shows that buying and selling furnish the great majority of the problems of adults. How to keep accounts and how to deal with problems involving percentage are other activities needing the attention of the school. It is significant that most of the problems involved only one arithmetical process.

One is convinced that Mr. Wilson's procedure is sound. However, we are not inclined to agree entirely with his conclusions.

A study in educational prognosis.—Within the last two decades considerable interest has attached to the movement for the measurement of educational prod-

¹ P. PASSY, *Les Sons du Français*, 1913. Pp. 86, 87.

² GUY M. WILSON, *A Survey of the Social and Business Usage of Arithmetic. Teachers College Contributions to Education, No. 100.* New York: Teachers College, Columbia University, 1919. Pp. v+62.